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"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values th inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the l church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian il Civilization.*"

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INTEGRAL RURAL LIVING AND CIVILIZATION

By Mildred Jensen Loomis*

People do not find it very difficult to put a finger on the "crisis" in our civilization. "There is something wrong with man's spirit," they say. It finds expression predominantly in negative qualities of greed, injustice, profit-seeking, monopolies and revenge. But we must remember that the human spirit is most often expressed in terms of things. Too often it is in wrong relationships to things. This negative response to material things is commonly called materialism. At bottom, it constitutes the trouble with our world.

Materialism is the valuing of things above the personality-growth factors inherent in all relationships to things. When "things" become the summum bonum--more valuable than the process of creating them, more desirable than the relationship with the people involved in producing, exchanging and using them--in short, when things are so primary as to obliterate the meaning behind them, then a culture is materialistic. People can become, as we have today, so enmeshed in the value of things that human life itself has little worth. Then even the monstrous degradation of global war can go on for years without revulsion.

We long for mankind to be spiritual. By "spiritual" I think we mean that man's relation to things is positive. He should relate himself to material things with creativity, justice, generosity and goodwill. When he does, life is better. When he creates things, he is a moral agent, responsible for them. When he is just and generous with things, human relationships are more harmonious. When he is creative, just and generous, qualities essential and peculiar to the human (as differentiated from the animal) appear and develop. Creativity, justice and generosity, these three--and in my mind, the greatest of these is creativity.

It seems to me idle to assume that matters of the spirit are removed from material things. In every single relationship of a person to a thing, opportunities for his own personality growth exist; very few relationships with things do not also involve relationships with one or more human beings. And it is a very tenuous relationship indeed, between individuals, which does not touch things at some crucial point. Material things are absolutely essential to human life. But it is in relationship to things that human spirits most often go astray. Herein lies the "prob-

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lem." The solution is not to condemn things as evil and deny ourselves the possession and ownership of them. Rather, we must find some principles by which we can relate ourselves to things so that conditions for personality growth and justice are most favorable. It was in searching out these principles that I discovered the productive home. It is in order to live out these principles that I am on a farm.

Rural living and a productive home grow out of my conviction that I must act on- not merely intellectually acknowledge--the religious concept of man's nature. While it is not their primary and continuous emphasis (as I believe it should be), most Christian groups are fairly clear on this concept: namely, that man differs essentially from animals in the possession of two specific faculties: intelligence--the ability to know the true, and free will--the ability to choose the good. The secular view holds that between man and beast there is only a quantitative difference, "intelligence" and "will" being merely extensions of sense and impulse.

In western civilization secular values dominate. We strive for essentially animal ends--material goods, money, power and sensuous thrills. Our method of getting necessary things produced and distributed is a secular answer. The whole trend and impact of modern industrial organization is to nullify man's spiritual nature. Specialization and mechanization reduce--indeed, almost eliminate--the need for intelligence and will in a determining majority of our citizens. Men become automatons in repetitive, mechanical operations. Our getting of things is at the cost of man's essential and spiritual nature. Living is progressively secularized.

Man is a creature of diverse powers and capacities. Diversification is his normal life. It was through diversification that his evolution was achieved. Millions of years ago the life forms that remained open to stimuli were the agencies for development to a higher level. Every development into a higher form came through awareness of and response to more and more stimuli. Diversification, not specialization, is the path by which human life too will develop and advance.

Yet today we are enamoured of specialization. We call it the road to progress. In post-graduate study of religion my professional adviser counselled against industrial arts. "You don't want that," she remonstrated. "You are going to be an administrator!" I was not fortified then with a clear idea of man's nature and certainly had no philosophy of work. But some as-yet-undeadened aspect of my being insisted on "using my hands" and I reveled in spinning, weaving, wood-carving and pottery for a whole semester! Our modern society denies such normal satisfactions to both children and adults, and for them substitutes offices, factories, movies and "education."

Everywhere it is apparent that specialization does not guarantee peace or happiness. People with an abundance of material things and a multitude of sensations are being destroyed by strain and boredom. For fifteen years I followed in the same pattern. But life was small and drab. The effect both in myself and others made me question. I heard of a school with the fascinating title, "School of Living," and sought it out. I found it to be a model home in its natural community at Suffern, New York, founded and then directed by Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Borsodi, which holds that "education arises in and must deal with actual affairs of life." There I saw and experienced a living pattern in keeping with man's spiritual nature. There I was persuaded to decentralization and the productive home on the land. It made me an advocate and user of the tool rather than the machine.

Eric Gill[1] defines a tool as anything which helps you do your work. A machine is one which you help. The man with a tool uses body, mind and will. He knows and

(1) Work and Culture, Eric Gill, Stevens Co., Providence, R.I.

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selects his tools, he knows and selects his materials, plans and designs the object, fashions the entire article with his muscles and hands, and last and most important of all, he is responsible for the completed article. Its quality and usefulness are entirely dependent upon him. If the material is sub-standard, or the craftsmanship imperfect, or the design ugly, or the object unfit for human use, he can be held accountable. He must face up to the moral implications therein.

(Such is the ethical and philosophical base for the ownership and use of private property. Man's work must develop his intellectual and moral powers. To be a moral and intellectual agent he must choose, plan and execute. And he cannot fully choose, plan and execute unless he has his own--private--tools and materials with which to work. Every individual must have an area--and a large one--where his decisions are his own. If any large percentage of property and tools is socially or group-owned, if decisions are made by "experts," or if made by groups, then the individual is ever sheltered from experiencing the results of his own choices. Then he is not a moral agent. Then his judgment and his powers do not unfold. For the spiritual and personality growth of the masses, the use of private property and tools must be widely distributed.)

Workers with tools use their full energies; their insights expand; their personalities grow. There is a sense of completion and well-being. Their work is of the nature of man and rewards them with mental, physical and spiritual health.

For the machine tender it is different. Watch anyone of them as they stand row on row at benches beside belt lines geared to mass production. He is not using his whole being. He did not plan the article nor select the material or the tool with which he is working. There is no demand on his imagination, nor little exercise of his physical capacities, for he really does not perform the work. He watches the work being done and tends the machine. Worst of all, he is not really responsible for the end product. It may be inferior, ugly, socially useless or destructive. That is nothing to him. He "just works there."

No, man is not just a head, nor just a body. While he can tolerate for a time the kind of specialization which modern life demands, he cannot live the whole span of his productive life in this fashion without serious maladjustment. To adapt to it means boredom and frustration. It drives people to find satisfaction in work's end product--money and the spending of money. It means suspension of thought and moral judgment. A husky under-middle-age man recently left a job in a large airplane factory and now runs a furniture repair shop in our village. "I like this lots better," he says. "Them big places get awful stale. A man's got to have his way more than they'll let you in a factory."

He had stated simply and baldly the central problem in a mass-producing society. I was stirred by his courage and independence in meeting it. Millions of "spirits" like him are suffering in a mechanized, specialized system. If they are not cogs in the production of things, they specialize in selling or distributing them. We have, indeed, a "sellers' culture" with masses unawakened to the thrill of cooperating with the organic forces of nature and the joy of creating things. Yet how many churches, or schools or printed pages are giving them insight, direction and leadership?

I am eternally grateful for the devious train of circumstances which led me to the School of Living which challenged and helped prepare me for a diversified, productive life on the land. For it is that life which best uses all man's capacities, where his intelligence, will and creative faculties come best into play, where the functioning and growth of his own powers is the summum bonum, where the process of creating is the central emphasis, rather than the number of things produced.

Our four years of actual living on a modern homestead have proved that it holds for us the answer to most of our deepest needs. By homestead I mean a home on a small plot of land where the family, maintaining its natural bond of unity, lives and works to produce its own food, clothing and shelter--the scene of integral living All the latent desires for marriage and a home--long hidden in intellectual search and career activities--surged forward in the millieu of the School of Living. It was easy then to accept marriage with a man who, in spite of some urbanization, had stayed close to the soil. Here we are constantly choosing goals and deciding problems; here we sit down to plan long-range processes in plant and animal production. Here the physical, biological, emotional, mental, social, artistic and religious forces within us come into natural functioning in the interesting and simplified (but not simple) business of creating and producing our own material needs. Life is leisurely, creative and satisfying. We sing, folk dance and discuss with neighbors; visitors are numerous. We subscribe to and read twenty magazines of wide range; we have time for study and meditation far in excess of most of our acquaintances living in a more commercial pattern.

Ours is a new-old pattern of living. We have thirty acres of crop land and eight of woods. This simple statement sets me all aglow. In the days when the country was merely a geographical area through which one passed in getting from one city to another, it would have seemed inconsequential. Now it means good black soil, full of living bacteria which one nourishes with organic material and protects from the offense of chemicals. Now it means awakening to the mystery of growth; it means watching green shoots glisten in the sun, and later when they head-up and turn golden quickening to the ritual of harvest. It means a kinship with weather; anguish at the death of the mare; drinking in the sweet fragrance of fruit blossoms; consuming food that is actually "sun, soil and human toil"; responding to the slow movements of the earth itself, and a whole new set of intangibles which add vitality to life and reality to God.

We have twelve sheep, a team, several cows, some pigs, a small flock of chickens and turkeys, a few hives of bees, and a lovely collie dog--which provide us practically all our needs. Only a natural surplus is sold. Since we produce first for use and not for sale, land, equipment and labor are kept at a minimum. We raise all our own food--vegetables, fruit, cereals, meat, milk, eggs, cheese, flour, molasses, honey. We process everything at home: butchering--we store much meat in a freezing unit; canning, churning, cheese-making, grinding of flour and cereal, baking, soap-making and weaving. Our sale of wool, lambs, cream and some grain care for essential outlays for taxes, gasoline, electricity, education and travel.

Our own sheeps' wool is spun at a nearby mill (though spinning is on our schedule) and we dye and weave it at home into blankets, drapes and garments. We ourselve did much of the refashioning of a hundred-year old cottage. Our living room with its pine paneled walls and cooperhood fireplace has more than thirty items of furnishings from our own or our friends' hands. The kitchen, on the other hand, is replete with modern labor-saving tools, and drudgery is eliminated with electricity. Churning, kneading of bread, preparation of juices, grinding meat, etc. is done by a heavy duty kitchen mixer. Flour is ground as we need it in a $15.00 kitchen mill. Cooking, washing, ironing, pumping are done with electric power for about $5.00 a month. A friend, in arranging the faucets for the dish-spray in the two-basin sink said recently, "I'm from the city. I'm not used to all these conveniences."

We like to point out that almost everything we have is produced at home or is a tool to assist in that production. And our tools remove most if not all of our lives from the exploitation of the "machine." It is just ten minutes from the wheat kernel to the oven, at our house, for a tasty and nutritious batch of muffins, con-

saining, in addition to the homeground flour, our own lard, eggs, buttermilk and coney. Each week we bake three two-pound loaves of whole-wheat bread for a total cost of 15 cents, including every item of cost for material, equipment, overhead, depreciation, etc. At the store its equivalent in nutrition could not be had for 66 cents. Such "work" requires ten minutes of my time in assembling materials and washing equipment. In that ten minutes I have saved 51 cents--or earned at the rate of about $3.00 an hour. On cereals we save even more. Our grocery bill is usually but a few dollars a month, and rarely reaches $5.00. We seldom use ration tickets. To purchase at the store an amount equal to our monthly consumption of home-produced food would require $50.00 or $55.00 in cash.

Food is one item that should never have been surrendered to the factory. Yet now it is an entrenched American habit. More money is invested in the milk industry than in the automobile business! Even farmers aid and condone that trend in buying flour, bread, butter, cereals, meat, fruit and vegetables. Monsignor L. G. Ligutti says(1) that Iowa farmers buy on the average of $250.00 of groceries a year which they could produce in a half-acre garden and seventy-five hours of labor. But to earn the net cash to buy this amount requires the 5 per cent profit from a hundred acres of corn and 500 hours of work! The real saving of the productive homemaker is in eliminating distribution costs. Besides that she eliminates the devitalizing process of milling, sterilizing, pasteurizing, packaging and storing with a corresponding gain in family health.

Another need of man, normal to the life on the land is the family. Over and over again social and religious agencies bemoan the present disintegration of the home. Many agree with the Malvern Conference of Churches in England that "the family is the most significant and should be the best guarded institution in society." But few agencies seem to be critically aware of the degree to which modern urbanization and industrialization contribute to its breakdown. Increasingly, the woman's place is not in the home. Everything is purchased. She has lost her economic validity in the home, so she gets a "job." Juvenile delinquency leaps forward. Each member of the family follows his or her own interests; there is no shared work; little shared life. Repeatedly I hear social workers state that their work is mostly family counselling because "families cannot by themselves meet the terrific impact of today's complexity." Surely some social workers must have read Mumford's Culture of Cities. All of them would do well to read Borsodi's This Ugly Civilization for a vision of a culture where families live on the land and together produce essential things; where children are assets instead of liabilities; and where necessary factories are in small towns or open fields, so that the families of their workers can be on homesteads close by. If we really believed "the family should be the best guarded institution in society" we would seriously set about organizing civilization in that direction.

Family ties cannot grow deep, nor the family itself be sustained, where the home is but a dormitory, or where it is but a place to get emotional security after the wear and tear of the day (or night) on "the job." Why should we continue the assumption that "the job" is primary? There is no sufficient reason why, if we wish it, the modern family cannot be first in society, and have all the creative activities, responsibilities and unity which the home of fifty years ago had, plus all the advantages of modern technology and psychology. But for that we must turn to the country.

A creative home with functional work for children is their natural birthright. Initiative, responsibility and purposing can best be achieved that way, as pointed

(1) Rural Roads to Security, Ligutti and Rawe, Bruce Publishing Co., Milwaukee

out by Ralph Gwinn and Frank Fritts.(1) The farm child sees and understands the processes about him. He sees the egg laid, the hen set, the little chicken appear and grow, which comes to his table. He feeds the pig which is sold to buy his bicycle. He participates in the harvesting. He sees and understands reasons for doing things, and so is able to make reason and purpose his own. In a word, he has faith that his present action will affect his own well-being and that of others. This faith and this action are the foundation of character. His spiritual nature grows on repeated daily activities rooted in such faith. The city child, lacking visible cause and effect relationships in daily life has no such basis for faith in the outcome of his own actions. He becomes a person who reacts to isolated events, and is likely to be without self-directing life purposes.

The family use of land and productive property brings up the question of ownership. Some religious and idealistic groups have declared it "materialistic" to own property. Particularly, under the impact of an exploitive individualistic capitalism, have we thought (I once held this view too) that ownership of private property was unethical. It seemed to us more altruistic and therefore "Christian" to follow the collectivist trend; to denounce "private property"; to suggest such vague reforms as "socialization of means and methods of production." If we did not go that far, we followed the cooperative movement, for while it did not ask that the State own and operate property, it did arrange essentially that people own it together. That seemed to us to eliminate the stigma of "individualism," "private property" and "competition," which have taken on such unsavory meaning in a misguided and wrongly grounded capitalism.

Human beings, obviously, are both individual and social, and their living must include experience in both realms. Basically and fundamentally the "individual" is the primary and highest unit. Personality is achieved within a Self--though, of course, through some interaction with other people. But, as indicated earlier, private property (tools) is necessary to this achievement.

The following considerations help clarify the "problem" of ownership, and to distinguish what should be private and what should be social.

Man has a natural right to his life, therefore, a natural right to sustain his life. All such sustenance comes from the earth. Therefore, it follows that every man must have a right to use the face of the earth on a basis of equality with all other men.

A man's energies being his own, he can choose to expend them in any way he wishes, so long as it does not infringe on the equal right of others to sustain themselves. If he chooses to sleep half the afternoon and fish for an hour, the fish is his. He produced it--secured it from its natural state. If another makes a basket from reeds on the creek bank, he owns a basket but no fish. Now if the fisher offers his fish for the basket and the basket-maker accepts, having free access to the river to produce his own fish if he wishes, then a valid exchange has been made. Each would rightfully own the new possession. Ownership of things (goods removed or transformed from nature) is based on their production or the giving in free exchange, where each has the alternative of withdrawing from the bargain because he has free access to the natural source.

For the ownership of land, it is different. Man does not create nor produce the land. Land is the gift of God to all mankind. A clay creek bank cannot be private property, owned by a man. A bowl fashioned from the clay pit is the private

(1) Fifth Avenue to Farm, Fritts and Gwinn, Harper Bros. Co., New York

possession of the man who made it. The wheat which the farmer raises, the flour and the bread from it can be called private property, but the land itself on which the wheat is grown, cannot. A house or fence or any other improvement on land are property and can be bought and sold, but land, in ethics, cannot. The Old Testament concept is right. "The land shall not be sold forever; for the land is Mine," saith the Lord. Lev. 25:23. Land can only be loaned by the community to the individual for use. If one man has a better, more productive piece of land than another, that overage or "privilege" should rightfully be shared with the whole community. No profit can ethically be extracted from the transfer of land to any man. To extract such a profit is to appropriate what the Lord said is Mine.

Until we come to grips with this issue--the basis for ownership of things as different from land, we shall never solve the problem of man's proper social and individual spheres. Use is the only rightful title to land. Use gives as great a security to title as a deed which permits the buying and selling of land, and is much more just. On the settling of this issue rests the solution of the problem of tenancy, which so sorely besets all peoples everywhere. In most countries present statutes invest the ground owners with legal power to collect rent from the occupiers of land and to evict them if the ground rent is not paid to them individually. This situation results in violation of economic laws which, in turn, produce monopoly, poverty and attendant government control of economic life. Elaboration of these issues is not possible in this paper.

Private property in <u>things</u> is ethical and necessary to the exercise of man's will and responsibility. This does not prevent nor inhibit people from cooperating. In some areas cooperation is good. In others it is not. Cooperation and joint associations should always be voluntary. Wherever any group, be it the State, a corporation, labor union or what not, makes association in economic affairs compulsory, something is wrong and man's <u>natural</u> rights have been transgressed. Our present so-called "free enterprise" does not issue in freedom because it rests on privilege in land. Because it has gone awry we have mistakenly assumed that everything "private" and all "property" was wrong. Similarly, we have over-enthusiastically espoused cooperation, and many people cooperate without careful analysis as to whether the activity is a suitable one for a cooperative.

Many activities are better done individually, and many are better done by families than by a cooperative association. For instance, in my mind, a sounder culture and better developed individuals would result if families produced their own food rather than bought it in cooperative associations. We must decide our basis for cooperation--as we ought to decide all economic and social activity--in reference to the principle, "What is in line with and good for man's spiritual or real nature?"

I share the conviction that a predominantly rural civilization will help drive the scourge of war from the earth. Ours is a civilization based on steel. Ours is a system most successful in times of war and which drags through depressions between wars. When business is low, factories shut down and the steel business falters. Tremendous investments in steel plants stand idle and thousands of men and families are unemployed. Mr. Borsodi challenges us to realize that there is a <u>limit</u> to the heavy steel which a peace-time civilization can use. A civilization which insists on its citizens working on steel instead of land is destined to periods of hunger. A centralized steel industry is destined, by the nature of the case, in low periods to grasp at armament which--in being constantly blown up and destroyed--furnishes unending outlet for its products.

A civilization geared to producing factory-belt-line <u>things</u> faster than people need or can use them seeks ever-expanding markets. As leading nations become surfeited with things, a scramble for markets develops. The flood of things crowds "national interests" into conflict and war. A steel-centered, thing-producing civilization heads straight into war. A conviction grows that we must change the <u>nature</u> (not only the administration) of the production of necessary things. I for one believe it should change in the direction of a predominantly rural culture with the major portion of life's sustenance--food, clothing and shelter--produced in modern homes and small communities.

Immediately comes a cry, "But we can't turn the clock back!" To which, as I've tried to show, one answers that <u>human progress is not measured in quantities of things produced but in the advance of intellectual and moral powers</u>. If intellectual and moral prowess is to be

increased by a change in producing necessary things, that change should be made. In my mind, it would be a step forward to a healthy civilization just as when a deranged mind comes to sanity.

Nor will a culture based principally on the productive home, eliminate all modern technology. Science and machinery will be used in a new way. Millions of small tools will foster home life instead of its being depleted by centralized machines in giant factories. The use of steel will be kept to a sensible level, with man's basic livelihood in his own hands on home steads. Ownership and placement of those factories needed for the production of essential tools and machines can be decentralized.

"But everyone couldn't manage a homestead," some protest. "They don't have what it takes. We can start with those who have. We can persuade those still on farms to produce for their own use. We can remind people that skill, initiative and creativity develop in situations which demand them. They will never appear if we stay in monotonous, repetitive work.

"Is there enough land for such a culture?" The late Franz Oppenheimer, noted scholar of land resettlement, said at Leland Stanford University, "If every family in the United States had the requisite land for good living (a little over twenty acres) two-thirds of the habitable area of our country would not be occupied!"

"But people can't get to the land. It's too expensive!" With which we sadly agree, havin skimped and saved and worked in town to secure enough for our own little homestead. But it can be done. The intelligence and will of leaders and groups have not yet been turned in full forc to this problem of making land available to the masses. There is an answer.

"Wouldn't we need some cities?" Surely, as market places and banking centers, but not to live in. "The city of the future," said Frank Lloyd Wright, "will be entered at ten o'clock and abandoned at four o'clock on four days a week. The rest of the time will be devoted to the more or less joyful matter of living under conditions natural to man."

How shall we bring about a creative rural culture adapted to the true spiritual nature of mankind? Honesty bids us admit that but a few of the 25 per cent of our people who still remain on the land, enjoy creative productive lives. Many are drudging, disease- and debt-ridden tenants; thousands are poverty-stricken migrants and sharecroppers. Responding to and driven by the need to feed large urban centers, many farmers are large-scale commercial one-crop specialists. By choice or necessity, even the owners of the independent, diversified family farms--which provide best opportunity for integral living--have taken over urban habits.

The only real and effective way to bring pride and conviction to productive living on the land is through education. It must be an education which clearly analyzes man's true nature; which ever reminds people of it; which boldly challenges them to work and to a daily living pattern in keeping with it. But more than that, education must provide the techniques and the practical steps for achieving that good living pattern.

Here is a challenge for the rural church--to become or develop in every community a "school of living." A school which knows the living problems of men, women and children, and actively helps in the solution of them in the light of their normal and essential nature. Chief among such problems is the acquiring of land, the changing of our present land customs and statutes to fit ethical standards, the solving of the money tangle, the demonstration and proof of the economic validity of the productive home. Basic to the whole effort is the conviction that for man, creativity is primary. Every such school could well take as their motto that of the School of Living where I learned it--"Creation is the dignification of labor, justification of suffering, and signification of life."

Mrs. Loomis writes that "this article, growing out of my experience and thinking, is an effort to show how a basic cure for the threat in our modern world can best be brought forth from the rural, decentralized pattern of living of which I am now happily a part."